

Faith and Inspiration

Jealousy - The Spotless Paper Table

Vacation Bible School, VBS for short. Growing up, my brother and I were the type of people who could be tapped for anything. Move a television, or dig a trough, or volunteer at a VBS. Or, volunteer at three during the same summer. Three churches, three back-to-back weeks, three renditions of the Western-style Saddle Ridge Ranch curriculum, three crowds of wild children ranging from preschooler to teenagers all fueled by Kool-Aid and Gushers.

Yes, it was horrible. And wonderful.

I can't remember all my brother did. I know I assisted an arts-and-crafts station at one VBS, helped lead worship at another, and taught a group of children at the third.

A lot of funny moments, like naming my worship-leading persona "Ranger Richard," only to have everyone pause and say, "Wait, you called yourself Ranger Rick?" That made me face-palm.

Or that time at the art class when I accidentally traumatized a misbehaving child. I threatened to tell her parents, get her in trouble. She went so pale, I thought the message got through, but then she grabbed a teacher, stabbed a finger at me, and shouted, "He says he's gonna kill my parents!"

I'm ashamed to say my immediate reaction was to double over in laughter because of how similar "tell" and "kill" must sound to her ears. Thankfully, the teacher got the joke, but the kid avoided me the rest of the season, always watching me out of the corner of her eye.

But my favourite memories are of my blessed group of little children I taught. More than taught: corralled during their playground time; chaperone to the bathroom; adult presence in their worship-time pew; and finally, the teacher who pressed hard those Biblical lessons.

The teaching time was the best time, all of us sitting around our assigned table, which was covered in paper to prevent messes and reduce the incidence of permanent damage.

I loved handing them each their photocopied handout, the cartoonish illustration of Jesus or Zacchaeus and the 2nd-grade grammar simplifications of life's complexities. I'd read it to them or prompt them to read to me; help them with the word searches or

fill-in-the-blank exercises; ask them why they thought Jesus wanted to go across the sea alone or why he wasn't mad that the old woman touched him; and discuss their own lives, joys and fears, their birthday parties or the mother late at work or how they could apply the lesson with their friends.

I think we had a good time.

There was one quirk about our group, though, a difference between our table and the dozen other ones scattered about the auditorium-sized room:



Luke Marshburn
Homestead Mennonite Church



Crayon covered the others. Rows of names, a dinosaur fighting a tow truck, butterflies and flowers and flying saucers. But not our table. Ours was brown, bland, unblemished.

I had banned the coloring, you see. My kids could use the crayons for their worksheets, but the table was strictly off-limits from their artwork.

The children once asked me why I did this, why I didn't let them make their table pretty like all the others. I explained to them that we had important lessons and discussions to do. I wanted as few distractions as possible.

Sure, coloring wasn't bad in itself, and plenty of people needed to fidget to pay attention, but they had their worksheets, they had proper outlets. I wanted them to respect that and my decision.

In short, I told them I was jealous. Yes, jealousy. Don't spit out the word. Jealous: "to be fiercely protective of one's rights and privileges." I was their teacher, I had a right to their attention, and I refused to let a table usurp it from me.

It's unfortunate that we in our American-Christian culture tend to decry negative emotions as "bad." Sorrow, doubt, anger, jealousy; we sometimes think that any emotion that brings pain must be shoved away. Some think anger is a sin, and I've never met anyone who told me they were proud about their jealousy.

I totally understand—the excesses of rage and envy can lead to some ugly interactions, loss of

control, even murder.

What I don't understand is the implicit assumption that these feelings are inherently evil.

Even God feels anger, and he describes himself as a "jealous God" (Exodus 20:5), not in any shamefaced way, but as a point of fact. He is protective of his rights; as the creator of the universe, as the savior, as the groom to us the bride, he has a legitimate claim to our attention and devotion.

When we choose to ignore or dishonor him, he is rational to feel jealous, even angry, that we would pick some lesser thing over him. Thus, he pursues us, admonishes us, censures us and guides us in an attempt to restore a right relationship, to recover the rights due him. Completely reasonable.

That's not even mentioning the mercy with which he tends to temper his actions, giving us chance after chance to choose him and rebuild the trust broken. God patterns for us healthy emotions and responses. His lesson of jealousy is no less important or valid than his lessons of love or justice. I believe our emotions, all of them, positive and negative, have proper times for expression and proper methods of execution that not only honor God, but also work to improve our relationships with him and each other.

I was a jealous teacher. My time and the time of my kids was important. We had plenty of life-giving discussions to have without needing to worry about the distraction of coloring the table. And we had those discussions, moments of growth, of inspiration, of reflection.

...That is, until the literal last day, when my co-teacher finally showed up for pretty much the first time and promptly began coloring on the table instead of teaching the lesson. I tried to tell her, but—nope, not one iota of attention from any of them, worksheets left undone, no more inspiration or reflection. Their minds were commandeered entirely. No prompting or pulling away crayons was going to get them back.

There is, however, a time and place for jealousy. That day, I patterned mercy. They had been faithful stewards of our time the entire week, I had watched them grow and their eyes light with excitement as they learned about how they can be God's cherished friends.

So I threw up my hands and rolled them the crayons, content.

To this day, I call them my class from Heaven, the best kids I've ever taught. I hope they remember our time together as fondly as I do.

Key Largo Sunset Point Park Closed until a New Management Plan is Approved, Parking Changes

The Monroe County Board of County Commissioners took steps on Monday to address complaints surrounding the overuse of Sunset Point Park in Key Largo.

The Board approved a resolution to prohibit parking on county rights-of-way in the Bay Harbor and Sunset Point subdivisions surrounding the park that takes effect immediately. The Board also closed the area between Bay Harbor Drive and the waterline while alternatives are investigated for safe usage of the park following its eventual reopening.

The changes were implemented at the request of dozens of neighborhood residents who have been experiencing quality of life issues due to a large number of park users and limited space. Park users frequently exceeded the limited parking for the neighborhood park by

parking vehicles and boat trailers on the shoulder of the narrow neighborhood roads, which causes traffic problems, safety issues, and difficulty for residents entering and leaving driveways.

The roads in the Bay Harbor and Sunset Point subdivisions are now designated as a no parking, standing, or stopping area. "No Parking" signage is being posted that will include the civil penalty set at \$200.

At the Bay Drive park, the Sheriff and his deputies are authorized to issue trespass warnings and can arrest any person who is found at the park.

The area will remain closed until an alternative management plan for the area is approved at a future board meeting.

The Board closed the area immediately to prevent the huge crowds that were expected to overwhelm the facility and surrounding neighborhood during the July 4 weekend.

Protect Dogs, Cats from Hot Weather



An estimated ten million or more households have acquired a cat or dog since the beginning of the pandemic, so that's a lot of new pets, and potentially a lot of first-time pet parents. Some people may be experiencing their first summer with their pets, and others may be simply getting out and about more and bringing pets along with them on errands or on road trips.

Many people are surprised to hear that most experts consider an outside temperature of 70 degrees to be warm enough that it may be unsafe to leave a pet inside a car, even for a short errand. Studies vary, but many show that the temperature inside a car on a 70 degree day can rise to 89 degrees in ten minutes, and to 104 degrees in only a half hour.

Heat stroke can occur when an animal's temperature rises to a critical level. Normal body temperatures for dogs and cats range from 100 to 102.5 degrees. When a dog's temperature rises to 108 degrees, or a cat's to 106 degrees, they can suffer irreparable organ damage and even die. Signs of heat stroke include heavy panting that does not resolve as the pet rests, increasing distress, a tongue color that is dark red to almost purple, weakness or collapse, hyper-salivation, vomiting and labored breathing.

If you suspect a dog or

cat is suffering from heat stroke move him to a cooler environment immediately and apply cool water to the abdomen, ears and footpads.

To prevent shock, don't pour ice water over the whole animal, submerge him in a tub of cold water or cover him in a cold, wet blanket. Once he is stable, get him to a vet clinic as quickly as possible, even if he seems to be cooling down and his temperature seems normal. Things may be happening on the inside that are not obvious from the outside.

A variety of situations like the extreme heat of a parked car, going for mid-day hikes or walks, or simply being in a yard with no shade can cause an animal to overheat. Best Friends Animal Society recommends taking precautions to keep dogs and cats healthy as the mercury rises:

- Keep pets indoors during the day. Quick walks and bathroom breaks are fine but try to keep your pet in the shade.
- If pets do spend time outside during the day, ensure that they have access to shade at all hours of the day.
- Provide pets with fresh, cool water at all times. During the heat of summer, water should be dumped and refilled often. Most dogs won't drink hot water no matter how thirsty they are.

Hemingway Days to Celebrate Literary Legend July 20-25 in Key West

Fans of Ernest Hemingway's literary greatness and vigorous life, including scores of bearded Hemingway look-alikes, are to converge on Key West Tuesday through Sunday, July 20-25, for Hemingway Days 2021. The annual celebration salutes the Nobel Prize-winning author's writing achievements, sporting pursuits and enjoyment of the island's easygoing lifestyle.

The festival's undisputed highlight is the Hemingway Look-Alike Contest at Sloppy Joe's Bar, 201 Duval St., a frequent hangout for the writer during his 1930s residence in Key West.

While coronavirus forced the cancellation of the 2020 contest, "Ernest" entrants are to return this summer to parade their "Papa" personas before a judging panel of previous winners during Thursday and Friday's preliminary rounds and the finale set



for Saturday, July 24.

At noon Saturday, the look-alikes plan to stage "Photos with Papas" outside Sloppy Joe's and then spearhead the annual "Running of the Bulls" — a wacky takeoff on Spain's renowned run that features the bearded brethren promenading with fake bulls on Key West's Duval Street.

The festival's literary events include the announcement and reading of the winning entry in the Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition coordinated by Ernest's author granddaughter. The

announcement is paired with the Key West Poetry Guild's reading of "Papa's Poems" and guild members' work, set for the evening of Wednesday, July 21 — the 122nd anniversary of Ernest Hemingway's birth.

Notable history and literary events also include a twilight walking tour of Hemingway's Key West. In addition, two Hemingway "museum days" are scheduled at Key West's Custom House Museum, 281 Front St., showcasing a rare collection of the author's documents, memorabilia and personal

belongings.

The Hemingway Days schedule also features the Stock Island Marina Village Key West Marlin Tournament and the 5k Sunset Run/Walk and Paddleboard Race, both saluting Hemingway's sporting lifestyle, and a lively daylong street fair on famed Duval Street.

Ernest Hemingway lived in Key West from 1931 until late 1939, penning classics including "For Whom the Bell Tolls" and "To Have and Have Not" in a small writing studio behind his Whitehead Street home.

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